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"American Empire" as Will and Idea

The new major strategy of the Bush Administration

1 The new division of the world

11 September 2001 was a transformative moment in strategic and conceptual thinking among the American political class. One initial outcome is the *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* published on 17 September 2002, which articulates the current American administration's view of power politics and maps out the resulting *grand strategy* it has devised. This states that the great struggles of the 20th century between liberty and totalitarianism ended with a "decisive victory for the forces of freedom". What has prevailed is "a single sustainable model for national success: freedom, democracy and free enterprise." The position of the USA in this model is unequivocal: "Today, the United States enjoys a position of unparalleled military strength and great economic and political influence."¹ There is a qualitatively new disparity of power: "Our world is divided in many ways: rich/poor; North/South; Western/non-Western. But more and more, the division that counts is the one separating America from everyone else".² In order to consolidate the United States' lead over all the other powers in the world a new global doctrine was forged after 1989 that has become hegemonical under the second Bush administration. In April 2002, the National Security Adviser responsible for the National Security Strategy, Condoleezza Rice, compared this development with the elaboration of the strategy to contain the Soviet Union in the period after the Second World War.

2 The players

The process has been propelled by a group of neo-conservative intellectuals and military policy-makers that began to acquire a higher profile in the 1980s under Reagan, secured a minority position in the military executive in the first Bush administration and then finally achieved a hegemonic majority position in the second Bush Administration and subsequently in the Republican Party with the help of, and in an alliance with, the Catholic religious right, the radical market ideologues and the traditional, social conservative, mainstream right ("compassionate conservatism"). This group dominated the foreign policy debate in the USA in 2002. It outlined the key military policy aspects of the new grand strategy, incorporated them in an optimistic view of the state of the US economy and established itself in the course of 2002 as the avant-garde of the new cross-party movement for war. The powerful political core of this group is composed of an alliance of Reaganite military men and neo-conservatives. They include Paul Wolfowitz, Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Zalmay Khalilzad, Douglas Feith, John R. Bolton and, above all, Richard Perle. A blueprint of the new policy is contained in the report entitled "Rebuilding America's Defense" published in 2000 by the neo-conservative, Reaganite "Project for the New American Century", whose authors include Wolfowitz and Bolton as well as numerous other members of the later Bush Administration (including Eliot Cohen, I. Lewis Libby, Dov Zakheim and Stephen Cambone). Among the signatories of the founding declaration of the "Project for the New American Century", which was launched "in the spirit of Reaganism" in 1997, were Jeb Bush, William J. Bennett, Dick Cheney, Midge

¹ The National Security Strategy of the United States of America, Washington September 2002 (NSS), Preface by George W. Bush, p. 1.

² Tony Judt: Review Its Own Worst Enemy, in: *The New York Review of Books* of 15 August 2002.

Decter, Steve Forbes, Francis Fukuyama, Fred C. Ikle, Donald Kagan, Zalmay Khalilzad, Norman Podhoretz, Dan Quayle, Stephen P. Rosen and Donald Rumsfeld. William Kristol was Chairman of the project in 2002. One of his directors, Robert Kagan, ranks among the most influential promoters of the journalistic use of the term "American Empire", e.g. in the neo-conservative newspaper, "*The Weekly Standard*", issued by Kristol and published by Rupert Murdoch. Other members of this group include speechwriters for Bush and Cheney (Joseph Shattan, Matthew Scully, John McConnell, Peter Wehner, Matthew Rees) and other members of the administration (Spencer Abraham, John Walters, Jay Lefkowitz, Elliott Abrams). Members of the network work for major national newspapers (*Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Times*, *National Review*, *New York Post*, *New Republic*) and they enjoy the support of a number of major think-tanks (*Hoover*, *Heritage*, *AEI*, *Hudson Institute*) and foundations (*Scaife*, *Olin*).³

3 The strategy

3.1. Assessments and targets

Between September 2001 and the middle of 2002 the Bush Administration prepared an analysis of the global situation and the resulting military policy and strategic objectives, in particular, which are markedly different from those of previous U.S. administrations in recent decades. These assessments and strategies were not new, but they now found acceptance in government and in the drive for hegemony.

- 1) Immediately after 11 September, the response of the U.S. Administration had focused on the struggle ("war") against terrorist *groups*. However, the enemy image was very quickly extended to include *states* that support terrorism ("*ending states*"). Bush's State of the Union address of 29 January 2002 then broadened the legitimacy of the use of military means to include states that threaten the USA with *weapons of mass destruction* ("axis of evil"), *independent* of any connection with terrorist groups.
- 2) The official *Quadrennial Defensive Review* (QDR) published on 30 September 2001 formulated the variations of the objectives as "changing the regime of an adversary state" and the occupation of "foreign territory until U.S. strategic objectives are met."⁴ In April 2002, Bush referred to a "*change of regime*" in Iraq as a military objective.
- 3) In his programmatic speech in June 2002 at West Point, Bush then declared that the previous doctrines of deterrence, containment and the balance of power were no longer adequate. He put the emphasis on *prevention* and *intervention*. From now on, he said, "we must take the battle to the enemy, disrupt his plans, and confront the worst threats before they emerge."⁵
- 4) Finally, a claim is asserted to the *global military sovereignty of the USA*, which is regarded as the key to the reconstruction of a new international

³ S. www.newamericancentury.org. J. Bookman: The president's real goal in Iraq, in: *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* of 29 September 2002. Robert Kagan: Power and Weakness, in: *Policy Review* 113 (2002). The project called from the outset for Saddam Hussein's removal from office, see *Washington Post* of 19 March 2002, *The Guardian* of 19 August 2002

⁴ QDR 01, p. 13.

⁵ West Point speech in mid-2002, quoted from Nicholas Lemann: The War on What? In: *The New Yorker* of 16 September 2002.

regime. In the words of George W. Bush: "America has, and intends to keep, military strengths beyond challenge."⁶

The formulation of this political strategy and the elaboration of the details in 2001 and 2002 was paralleled by a steady growth in the arms budget, a devaluation of the status of multilateral and international agreements and the discrediting of arms control policy (chemical and biological weapons; land mines; International Court of Justice, etc.). The production of missile defence systems was stepped up and the emphasis placed on the capacity to wage war rather than on the task of guaranteeing stability. The regional focus switched clearly to Asia. These changes in strategy are understood as being responses to the changes in the world situation since 1989. The report on "Rebuilding America's Defense" drawn up by the neo-conservative "Project for the New American Century" summed things up as follows in the year 2000: "Over the decade of the post-Cold War period, however, almost everything has changed. The Cold War world was a bipolar world; the 21st century world is – for the moment, at least – decidedly unipolar, with America as the world's "sole superpower". America's strategic goal used to be containment of the Soviet Union; today the task is to preserve an international security environment conducive to American interests and ideals. The military's job during the Cold War was to deter Soviet expansionism. Today its task is to secure and expand the "zones of democratic peace;" to deter the rise of a new great power competitor; defend key regions of Europe, East Asia and the Middle East; and to preserve American pre-eminence through the coming transformation of war made possible by new technologies. From 1945 to 1990, U.S. forces prepared themselves for a single, global war that might be fought across many theaters; in the new century, the prospect is for a variety of theater wars around the world (...). During the Cold War, the main venue of superpower rivalry, the strategic "center of gravity," was in Europe (...) the new strategic center of concern appears to be shifting to East Asia."⁷ The predominant objective of this strategy is not the fight against terrorist groups or states, but the maintenance and extension of the disparity between America and the rest of the world and the worldwide enforcement of the model of American dominance.

3.2. Military superiority

The first method employed to achieve this objective is the consolidation of unrivalled U.S. military superiority. In domestic terms this requires the building up of a national potential that naturally extends far beyond America's borders. In external terms the emergence of any military and political rivals must be thwarted by whatever means are necessary. As far back as February 1992, the Pentagon's draft Defense Planning Guide 1994-1999 stated: "Our first objective is to prevent the re-emergence of a new rival, either on the territory of the former Soviet Union or elsewhere, that poses a threat on the order of that posed formerly by the Soviet Union."⁸ The National Security Strategy published over a decade later reinforces this goal: "Our forces will be strong enough," the NSS states, "to dissuade potential adversaries from pursuing a military build-up in

⁶ Quoted from Michael Lind: Is America the New Empire? In: *The Globalist* 19 June 2002. Cf. also *New York Times* of 22 September 2002

⁷ p. 2 f.; Robert Kagan, William Kristol: The Bush Doctrine Unfolds, in: *Weekly Standard* of 4 March 2002

⁸ Dick Cheney was then Secretary of State for Defense. The draft bears the hand of Wolfowitz and Libby. The report on "Rebuilding America's Defense" of 2000 expressly picks up on this draft (p. 11). See Michael T. Klare: Endless Military Superiority, in: *The Nation* of 15 July 2002, Nicholas Lemann: The Next World Order, in: *The New Yorker* of 1 April 2002 and Frances FitzGerald: George Bush & the World, in: *The New York Review of Books* of 26 September 2002.

hopes of surpassing, or equaling, the power of the United States."⁹ In an interview on the *Public Broadcasting Network* the National Security Advisor, Condoleezza Rice, put it more bluntly: "But if it comes to allowing another adversary to reach military parity with the US in the way that the Soviet Union did, no, the US does not intend to allow that to happen, because if it happens, there will not be a balance of power that favours freedom".¹⁰ The logical upshot is that a "threat-based" military doctrine, as it is called, is being replaced by a "capabilities-based approach", which stipulates that armament and military dislocation should be geared to defeating any conceivable attack by any conceivable enemy at any conceivable time¹¹. To that extent deterrence remains in place as a policy objective and instrument. But the rationale of this policy has changed. It is now a question of consolidating the uniquely dominant position enjoyed by the USA.

3.3. Preventive wars

The second element of this policy is the doctrine of "pre-emption" and, above all, of "prevention". A preventive war was an option that was seldom articulated in the past and kept largely on the back burner. Rare examples were the threat of the use of nuclear weapons against North Korea and the justification of the cruise missile attacks on Afghanistan and Sudan under Clinton. Both these options have been given enhanced status under Bush. There was a massive increase in the calls for pre-emptive action of this kind after the events of 11 September 2001. Speaking at West Point in mid-2002, Bush said: "For much of the last century, America's defense relied on the Cold War doctrines of deterrence and containment. In some cases, those strategies still apply. But new threats also require new thinking. Deterrence - the promise of massive retaliation against nations - means nothing against shadowy terrorist networks with no nation or citizens to defend. Containment is not possible when unbalanced dictators with weapons of mass destruction can deliver those weapons on missiles or secretly provide them to terrorist allies." Preventive acts of war are now explicitly allowed on an extensive scale. They are regarded as permissible in respect of military strikes against terrorist groups, against states that support them and against states that are already in possession of weapons of mass destruction, in the process of acquiring them or merely attempting to do so. The USA has the unique right to intervene anywhere in the world, which includes military action that is "pre-emptive", "anticipatory" or geared to "anti-access denial": ".....our best defense is a good offense"¹².

Action of this kind – irrespective of what action the enemy actually takes – makes it clear that the notion of self-defence has been buried. What was previously regarded as being the last resort now becomes the done thing. The high level of uncertainty in respect of information and decision-making and hence the threat of destabilisation that is bound up with a policy of prevention no longer form part of the debate. The guideline drawn up in January 2002 on the use of nuclear weapons allows the preventive use of nuclear weapons against "rogue states" that do not have any nuclear weapons but are merely suspected

⁹ NSS, p. 30.

¹⁰ *The Times of India* of 26 September 2002. The sentence "The President has no intention of allowing any foreign power to catch up with the huge lead the U.S. has opened up since the fall of the Soviet Union" was included in the NSS version issued on the morning of 20 September 2002, but it had been deleted by the afternoon, see the press briefing of the press spokesman, Ari Fleischer, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/09/20020920-2.html>.

¹¹ S. Michael T. Klare: Endless Military Superiority, in: *The Nation* of 15 July 2002.

¹² NSS, p. 6: "We must deter and defend against the threat before it is unleashed" (NSS, p. 14). "America will act against such emerging threats before they are fully formed." (Bush's preface to the NSS, p. 2).

of attempting to develop or gain possession of them. A barely heeded declaration made by the Under Secretary of State for Arms Control, John Bolton, on 21 February 2002 marked the ending by the Bush Administration of the old guarantee given by the USA that it would only employ nuclear weapons against countries that were in possession of nuclear weapons themselves or in an alliance with a nuclear power. This was underlined by the enhanced efforts to develop nuclear weapons capable of penetrating deep into the earth and destroying underground bunkers.

3.4. Global sovereignty

The strategy of preventive war (pre-emption), which is understood to mean a widening of the paradigms of deterrence and containment, is closely bound up with the new vitality of the "hegemonic international law nihilism" (Norman Paech) that is exhibited by the present U.S. Administration. It is rooted in the idea that only the USA will be entitled to global sovereignty in the future world order. The notion of global sovereignty means that the USA will lay down international rules (e.g. on alliances and the formation of blocs), determine what constitutes a crisis ("state of emergency"), distinguish between friend and foe and make the resulting decision on the use of force. Only the USA is capable of employing force anywhere in the world. This is the third pillar of the new *grand strategy*, which is exemplified above all else by the concept of an exclusive right to preventive military intervention all over the world. The startling erosion of the war limitation potential enshrined in international law thus continues unabated following the introduction in recent years of numerous exceptional circumstances. Commitments to international alliances and, in particular, to the United Nations are rejected as constituting a restriction of the USA's freedom to act.¹³ The claim to global sovereignty includes

- the devaluing of international commitments in the form of multilateral agreements, international institutions and alliances,
- the maximum possible enforcement of American law on an international scale
- and a kind of U.S. Brezhnev strategy of "limited sovereignty".

The traditional approach adopted to underpin US claims to hegemony was to exercise direct control only of the foreign-policy relations of countries plus their finances and the militarily relevant high-tech sector. Now the scope of direct intervention has been greatly extended. The indirect control of the past has been replaced by "the right to intervene"¹⁴. As a result, the destabilisation of international security arrangements is not only accepted, but actively pursued. Multilateral arms control regulations have been weakened. The ABM Treaty was terminated in December 2001 and a strengthening of the Biological Weapons Convention at the Fifth Review Conference in late 2001 foundered on the resistance of the USA.

4 Empire

The Director of the neo-conservative Olin Institute for Strategic Studies at Harvard University, Stephen Peter Rose, who worked in the Department of Defense, the National Security Council of the USA and the Naval War College and was a founding member of the Project for a New American Century, summarised the basic assumptions of this new military view of the world in mid-2002 as

¹³ See New York Times of 22 September 2002.

¹⁴ See the remarks of the Director of Policy Planning of the US State Department, Richard Haass, in Nicholas Lemann: *The Next World Order*, in: *The New Yorker* of 1 April 2002.

follows: "The United States has no rival. We are militarily dominant around the world. (...) We use our military dominance to intervene in the internal affairs of other countries (...) our goal is not combating a rival, but maintaining our imperial position, and maintaining imperial order (...) Planning for imperial wars is different from planning for conventional international wars. In dealing with the Soviet Union, war had to be avoided (...) Imperial wars to restore order are not so constrained. The maximum amount of force can and should be used as quickly as possible for psychological impact—to demonstrate that the empire cannot be challenged with impunity. During the Cold War, we did not try very hard to bring down communist governments. Now we are in the business of bringing down hostile governments and creating governments favorable to us. (...) Imperial wars end, but imperial garrisons must be left in place for decades to ensure order and stability. This is, in fact, what we are beginning to see, first in the Balkans and now in Central Asia (...) Finally, imperial strategy focuses on preventing the emergence of powerful, hostile challengers to the empire: by war if necessary, but by imperial assimilation if possible."¹⁵

The "new unilateralism" (Charles Krauthammer) of the USA has been accompanied for the past 18 months and more by the use in politics and political science of terminology that includes the "American Empire".¹⁶ Among those who have talked of the *American Empire* are Henry Kissinger, Gore Vidal, Tom Wolfe, Joseph Nye, Dinesh D'Souza, Charles Krauthammer, Robert Kaplan and Max Boot.¹⁷ The terminology employed by the 'Empire scholars' (Emily Eakin in the *New York Times*) has adherents not just in the neo-conservative journalistic and academic camp. Essentially, the use of the term *American Empire* is an attempt to give expression to the concept that America is no longer merely an exceptional super, hyper or hegemonic power. What is needed is a "gorilla of geo-political designations"¹⁸ – the *empire*, in other words. The shift in terminology from "dominance" to "hegemony" to "empire" is significant, above all, because it highlights the classical concept of *direct* political control by an imperial centre. The emphasis is on hegemony through coercion as opposed to hegemony through leadership. It is a question of *indefinite dominance*. The rhetoric, concept, strategy and policy of the empire camp are not new. The difference is that they are now in power.

¹⁵ Stephen Peter Rosen: The Future of War and the American Military, in: Harvard Magazine 5/2002.

¹⁶ S. H. J. Krysmanski's website on the subject of the "New World Order" (2002); Jürgen Wagner, the Eternal Empire, Hamburg 2002; Philip S. Golub: The Imperium Americanum as a Historical Concept, in: *Le monde diplomatique* September 2002; Emily Eakin: "It takes an empire", say several U.S. thinkers, in: *New York Times* of 2 April 2002; Thomas E. Ricks Empire or Not? A Quiet Debate Over U.S. Role, in: *Washington Post* of 21 August 2001, p. A01.

¹⁷ H. Kissinger: Does America Need a Foreign Policy? New York 2001; Joseph S. Nye jr.: The Paradox of American Power, New York 2002; Dinesh D'Souza: In praise of American empire, in: *The Christian Science Monitor* of 26 April 2002; Jonathan Freedland: Rome, AD ... Rome, DC? In: *The Guardian* of 18 September 2002; Robert Kaplan: Warrior Politics: Why Leadership Demands a Pagan Ethos, Random House 2001; Andrew J. Bacevich: American Empire, Harvard 2002; Max Boot: The Case for an American Empire, *Weekly Standard* of 15 October 2001; idem., Savage Wars of Peace, in: Hoover Digest 3/2002

¹⁸ Jonathan Freedland: Rome, AD ... Rome, DC? *The Guardian* of 18 September 2002